

# MountainRise

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## **Peas in a POD: Faculty Development and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning**

**Laura Cruz, Editor**

When Ernest Boyer originally wrote about SoTL, he called it the Scholarship of Teaching. The “L” part of SoTL, learning, was added later to acknowledge the deep relationship between teaching and learning that had arisen from the learning-centered revolution in higher education pedagogy (Hutchings & Shulman, 1999). Since that time, SoTL has emphasized and, indeed, celebrated the primacy of student learning outcomes as evidence of effective practice. It is easy, however, to downplay the T, teaching. At the institutional level, SoTL initiative are often housed in Centers for Teaching and Learning (CTLs), which are focused on SoTL as part of comprehensive faculty development programs. What CTLs have found is that the production of SoTL solidifies and rewards teaching as a reflective act, and the consumption of SoTL promotes and encourages innovation and collaboration. The articles in the Spring 2013 issue of MountainRise share a focus on the “t” and highlight the contributions of SoTL work to the professional development of highly effective teachers.

In the United States, the academic organization that oversees and leads the field of faculty development is called POD (Professional and Organizational Development Network). According to POD, faculty development, and by extension faculty development centers, focus on three critical areas: the faculty member as teacher, the faculty member as a scholar and professional, and the faculty member as a person (POD, 2013). Under the heading of faculty member as teacher, the POD definition lists student evaluation of instruction. Lorraine Gilpin, in “Enhancing Teaching and Learning: Harnessing Written Comments on Evaluations”, asks the question, how are decisions about teaching and learning made? Her study argues that such decisions should be evidence driven, and that evidence can be discerned through analysis of student rating of instruction. In her piece, she writes about ways to interpret end-of-year evaluations not simply as summative assessments, but also as data for revising courses or curriculum. Her study focuses on written comments, as opposed to numerical rankings, and constructive ways to interpret student responses to effect long-term improvements in teaching and learning. Her study, while small, suggests that previous studies that called the efficacy of written comments into question may have overlooked the benefits that they can provide to an instructor willing to take the time to interpret them fully.

Similarly, Victoria Budzinski McMullen, in “An Investigation of Course Requirements and Student Motivation to Complete Required Readings”, looks at a perennial problem in student learning, i.e. getting students to complete out-of-class readings. Many faculty assume that the problem lies in student motivation (or lack thereof), but McMullen’s study suggests that the problem may lie in a lack of congruence between faculty and student expectations. For faculty, the value of completing required readings is self-evident, but to students that assumption may not always hold. When faculty at different levels of the same program implemented interventions designed to make these assumptions more explicit, student compliance with required readings rose accordingly. McMullen’s study suggests that student learning outcomes are highly intertwined with faculty expectations and assumptions and, therefore, faculty development.

Faculty development practices that support faculty members as scholars and professionals includes support for exploring and facilitating the production of new forms of scholarship, especially the scholarship of teaching and learning. Craig Seal led a team of faculty at the University of the Pacific, who together have provided a collaborative piece, “Celebrate Teaching and Learning: A SoTL Symposium at the University of the Pacific” that looks at how faculty produce, consume, and share SoTL at an institutional level. The piece describes a faculty-driven event in which instructors from across the campus presented their scholarly teaching and scholarship in a conference format that included presentations and interactive sessions. The rationale behind the symposium went beyond simple collaboration, however, but also aimed at cultural and organization change. The focus, as the authors state, was on “building sustainable pedagogies from within.” Four detailed examples of these sustainable pedagogies are included, as well as reflection on the institutional impact of the symposium and the continuing conversations that it inspired.

The third category of faculty development focuses on the well-being of the faculty member as a person. This can include something as simple as physical well-being, but it also covers areas of the affective domain, including a feeling of belonging. In their study entitled “Collaborative Teaching in a General Education Seminar: An Assessment of Faculty Outcomes”, Jeremiah Wills and Christine Allegretti surveyed faculty about their participation in interdisciplinary, team-taught general education courses and

how their participation in the program affected their perceptions of their work. Most of the faculty participants reported positive effects on their teaching practice (as expected), but Wills and Allegretti also found that there were correlations between those positive effects and other aspects of well-being, including a sense of community and stress reduction. While these effects also correlated with how closely faculty were able to teach to their disciplinary expertise, their research has considerable implications for further research into the relationship between faculty satisfaction and teaching practice.

The definition of faculty development provided by POD does not specifically mention technology, but the current popularity of integrated CTLs, also deemed “the teaching academy organized around technology”, one of the organizational types outlined by Lee Shulman, suggests that the use of instructional technology has also become inextricably intertwined into faculty development (Shulman, 1999). In this issue, Robert Crow’s review of Derek Bruff’s *Teaching with Classroom Response Systems: Creating Active Learning Environments* highlights how instructional technology enhances and facilitates innovative pedagogy. The book utilizes a question/answer format to help those new to using clickers (or related tools) determine if the technology is an appropriate fit for meeting their learning objectives, while providing concrete applications, models, and examples of how it has worked for others.

James Ullmer and Steven Miller, in “Using Blogs to Enhance the Learning Experience in Social Sciences: An Application in Economics”, discuss the use of social media tools for teaching economics, but in an innovative way. Rather than looking at having students use or develop blogs, their practice focuses on having students become consumers of blogs. Much of the research on instructional technology focuses on the ability of tools, like blogs, as enhancing engagement. Ullmer and Miller, on the other hand, examine blogs as a means of extending lifelong learning goals and showing students how to become responsible, and consistent, consumers of information and perspectives about economics. Their analysis demonstrates how the consumption of information from blogs helped to build student interest and enthusiasm for the study of economics and its relationship to their current and future goals.

The articles in this issue of MountainRise suggest that faculty development and innovation in teaching and learning go hand in hand, not unlike, as they say, two peas in a pod. In addition to focusing on the different roles that faculty play, the POD Network further suggests that faculty development take into

account not only instructional and professional development, but also organizational development. The close and symbiotic relationship between teaching and learning suggests that, from an organizational perspective, CTLS can play a pivotal role in facilitating organizational change in higher education (Schroeder, 2011); working with faculty to create a culture that nurtures and rewards both innovative teaching and exceptional learning.

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## **Enhancing Teaching & Learning: Analysis of Module and End-of-Course Narratives**

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### **Abstract**

Purposes of student evaluations include measuring teaching effectiveness and helping teachers improve teaching (Lang & Kersting, 2006). Improvement of teaching and learning is the core of SoTL (Huber & Morreale, 2002). This study reflects Lewis' (1991) assertion that, when qualitatively analyzed, written comments on student evaluations can provide rich information for course improvement. Written comments from end-of-course and module evaluations for 49 students 15 students serving as a reference group, were analyzed in order to inform decisions about course revision. Module evaluations yielded higher completion rates and greater details about specific course activities than end-of-course evaluations.

## Introduction

End-of-semester student ratings of instruction or end-of-course evaluation are a staple in higher education. The purposes of student evaluation include measuring teaching effectiveness for decision making, such as tenure and promotion; to help students select courses and instructors; and to help teachers improve their teaching (Lang & Kersting, 2006). These purposes reflect issues that are pivotal to SoTL. Yet, several concerns, completion rate through timing to motivation, have been raised over the use of end-of-term student ratings of instruction (Marlin, Jr., 1987; Adams, 1997; Armstrong, 1998; and Smith & Morris 2012). Given that no single tool is perfect, answers to questions about teaching and learning should come from multiple sources, including formative ones. Written comments from end-of-course and module evaluations for 49 students with an additional 15 students serving as a reference group, were analyzed in order to inform decisions about course revision.

“It is commonly groused that graduate programs train their candidates neither to teach, nor design a course” (Beckett, 1997, p. 142). Often faculty learn to teach through observation and imitation, but even that is a challenge due to lack of openness about the practice and processes of teaching. After all, the teaching community has traditionally been idiosyncratic and privately oriented (Gilpin, Bodur, & Crawford, 2009). Nonetheless, most educators, irrespective of level, would agree that teaching and learning require ongoing reflection, assessment, and revision (Beckett, 1997). A common source of assessment and accountability in higher education is, of course, end-of-term student ratings of instruction (Donovan, Mader, & Shinsky, 2006; Lang & Kersting, 2006; Armstrong, 1998; Adams, 1997). Lang & Kersting (2006) identify purposes of student evaluations including measuring teaching effectiveness for decision making, such as tenure and promotion; to help students select courses and instructors; and to help teachers improve their teaching (p. 1). These purposes reflect issues that are core to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). Scholars of teaching and learning are often engaged in multi-pronged inquiries geared toward improving their own teaching and their students’ learning; sharing results of their inquiries at grassroots and global levels; and taking steps necessary to ensure that their work meet the criteria for and count as scholarship (Huber & Morreale, 2002; Huber & Hutchings, 2005; McKinney, 2007).



Impetus for this study came from a program decision to modify ESED 5234: Cultural Issues- ESOL (Cultural Issues), one of the required courses in our English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) endorsement program, as an introduction to ESOL to be required for all undergraduates and masters-level students; and maintain requirements for endorsement status. The charge came with a mandate of what was to be added to the course within the existing credit hours. It is of paramount importance to respond to the regional and national population growth of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students (CLDS) and also to address a lack of teacher preparedness in working with the students and will require a course revision (Youngs & Youngs, 2001; Lucas, Villegas, and Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). Yet, modifying this already compressed course within the same number of credit hours is a tough task. Further, the course in its current form is the result of years of constant inquiring into best practice in preparing students to work with CLDS and online learning. What form should this redesign take? What aspects of the course should be eliminated? What aspects of the course should be modified? On what basis should these decisions be made? These questions are part of a broader one: How are decisions about teaching and learning made?

Upon completion of the course, students are expected to have an understanding of the complexity of identity and its implications; barriers and catalysts to communication between cultures; impact of institutional racism and discrimination, as well as teacher and societal biases on CLDS and all students; and culturally and linguistically responsive teaching. Examples of course objectives are: describe ways to negotiate and sustain communication between cultures; and develop a plan to initiate or improve the cultural climate of a specific school or educational setting. Cultural Issues: ESOL is an online course that is offered in the summer, which exacerbates the situation. The course is offered in four modules and self-selected graduate and undergraduates were enrolled. The course was designed to maximize interactions in an online environment and the use of resources in the construction of knowledge. Course activities include readings (including case studies), discussions (sometimes in small-group formats such as literature circles or chats), and journaling; video, movie, legislation, and school climate analyses; and interactive online quizzes and activities focused on issues such as stereotyping, equity, and social justice issues; and completion of an interview with a culturally and linguistically diverse adult, whose second language is English and analysis of that interview. The last requirement at the end

of each module is a module evaluation. Students also completed an end-of-semester rating of instruction. Both data sets are utilized in this study. Conceptually, module evaluations belong in the formative or ongoing assessment category (an old concept in education), while end-of-course evaluations are more summative in nature.

Several concerns have been raised over the use of end-of-term student ratings of instruction in general from completion rate through timing to motivation (Marlin, Jr., 1987; Adams, 1997; Armstrong, 1998; Roberson, 2004; Smith & Morris 2012). Common concerns about relying on course evaluations to measure effectiveness and improve teaching include low completion rate; students doubt the ratings have any real impact; and the timing of ratings at the end of the course when it will not change the course for those students completing the ratings (Marlin, Jr., 1987; Adams, 1997; Armstrong, 1998; Smith & Morris 2012). Adams (1997) adds that students' ratings are influenced by the level of difficulty of the first test, grades students received in general, and whether or not the course is required. A year later, it was noted by Armstrong (1998) that "the ratings/learning relationship seems to be based heavily on studies involving rote learning" (p. 1223).

Research on student ratings of instruction may or may not include discussion of the written comments. Lewis (1991) asserts that interpreting the written comments on end-of-course student evaluations is an arduous task for faculty. In addition, since comments are often in direct conflict with one another and faculty feel that students are not qualified to judge their teaching, written comments are often dismissed (Lewis, 1991, p. 25) in spite of the fact that when qualitatively analyzed they can yield rich information for course improvement. Lewis demonstrates that students' written comments can be organized and interpreted through the use of categorization, scaled ratings, existing or instructor created matrices, and analysis grids: "In the end, instructors will find that bringing a little order to the chaos of written responses will reveal the treasure of information they can provide" (Lewis, 1991, p. 32). However, concerns abound about the written comments as well. The narrative portion of student rating of instructions often includes references to circumstances that are beyond the instructor's control (Donovan, Mader, & Shinsky, 2006) or is used as an avenue to vent frustrations (Marlin, Jr., 1987). In previous studies, written responses were not found to provide meaningful information for improving courses, but offered summative judgments based on satisfaction or dissatisfaction with aspects of a

course/instructor/instruction or the course/instructor/instruction overall (Adams, 1997; Armstrong, 1998; and Donovan, Mader, and Shinsky, 2006). Despite its flaws, course evaluation remains a staple in higher education.

Drawing upon interviews of senior academics and student representatives in the United Kingdom, Smith & Morris (2011), articulated significant findings indicating that effective course evaluations is an integral part of improving quality and standards in higher education. The following findings from their report are relevant to the current study: effective course evaluation is necessary in communicating the value of the course to students; universities struggle with meaningful response rates; new technologies can improve turnaround time; the use of formative evaluations can improve the process; students will be more invested in evaluating a course if the evaluation has direct bearing on their experience in that course. They concluded that both institutional and student representatives are interested in improving course evaluation practices and most importantly, meaningful and transparent course evaluation practices will be a part of how stakeholders make judgments about the quality of teaching and learning (Smith & Morris, 2011). The use of module evaluations, a formative evaluation, is a move toward the latter end.

### **Relating the process**

Anonymous end-of-course and module evaluations for 49 students (32 undergraduates and 17 graduates; one female of Puerto Rican descent, 3 Mexican American females, 6 African American females, 35 white females, 1 black male and 3 white males) were used in the study with 15 additional students from a prior term serving as reference. The students' comments were narratively coded and analyzed in order to discern patterns that may be useful in revising the course. The study used two sets of standard question scripts from the university and its center for online learning. The two questions used in the end of the course evaluation are: 1. What did you like least about this instructor/course? 2. What did you like most about the instructor/course? At the end of each module students are required to submit a module evaluation. The evaluations are embedded in the modules as the last item in order to encourage students to complete the module. There are no credits or penalties associated with the completion of module evaluations. The module evaluations are comprised of written responses to three, similar to the ones used in the end-of-course evaluations: 1. What would you change about this learning

module? 2. What did you like least about this learning module? 3. What did you like best about this learning module? I treated question one and two as a single category. The written comments on the module evaluations and end-of-semester course evaluations provided data for the study. They served as text, which upon analysis provide qualitative and quantitative data about teaching and learning in the course (Casey, 1995; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a & 1998b, and Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Specifically they were treated as field texts from which patterns, themes, and gaps could be derived in the drafting of interim texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 132). Thirteen randomly selected comments were read and coded by key words. Similar key words were color-coded. Comments were grouped by those with similar keywords and also by theme or focus. Next, a tentative title for each cluster was derived from the key words and/or focus of the written comments forming the interim text (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Categories that emerged includes instructor qualities; general thoughts on the course overall; technology trouble; specific aspects of the course that were liked; and specific aspects/activities that were disliked. Each comment that related to a specific activity was listed as either liked best or least as well. In addition a tally was made each time the same activity showed up in either category. This process was repeated for every specific course activity mentioned. The strength of the comments and suggestions, as indicated by choice of words, upper case letters, and punctuation, were also anecdotally recorded.

### **Making sense of the data**

This section is organized in two parts. The first section presents and discusses data from end-of-course student rating of instruction, while the second section looks at data from module evaluations. Each section is followed by a discussion with connection to relevant literature.

**Reference Group.** A reference group's information was included to help develop a sense of the types of written comments made before the module evaluations. It also helped gauge whether the study group's completion of the module evaluation impacted their course evaluation. Of the fifteen students in the course, twelve completed the end-of-semester evaluation. Eight students made written comments. In the "Most Liked" category, two students referenced the "immigrant interview project," one student stated "chats" and one student referenced " literature circle." In the "Least Liked" category, one student disliked the class discussions and one student disliked the readings. Revising the course based on recurrent themes in student comments was challenging because it was difficult to discern themes from the

comments since each student discussed different aspects of the class (with the exception of the two students that both liked the immigrant project). The comments are as follows:

- Make the course face to face.
- Make chats worth more.
- The course is organized.
- Some of the readings were a little difficult to get through.
- Provide more details with directions for assignments.
- I really enjoyed the lit circles. We really learned a lot from our discussion and were able to teach each other things some might have missed from the readings or things we had learned from personal experiences.
- The immigrant interview project was very informative and I enjoyed the PowerPoints of others in the class.
- I really enjoyed interviewing a gentleman from Cuba. His story of circumstances surrounding his leaving his homeland was gripping.

**Study Group.** Twenty-seven of forty-nine students completed the student ratings of instruction. Of these, 19 provided written comments. The comments are organized in the following three categories: liked best, liked least, and specific course activity. Analysis of the responses to the open-ended questions of course evaluation showed a total of 12 comments, which made specific references to course activities. Four specific course activities were mentioned: the immigrant interview assignment (seven students liked it best); videos (two students liked the videos best and one would change some of the videos); class discussions (one student liked it best); and questions in the modules (one student liked them best). Examples of comments follows (individual comments, as they were written, are separated by semi-colons): I loved the videos that you implemented instead of just the readings and immigrant interview project; the videos and readings were really interesting and I learned a lot about what it means to be a multicultural person; she really loves this subject area and provided relevant materials. The questions in modules and assignments were thought provoking and allowed students to express their ideas and personal opinions; and more videos that correlate with readings. The written comments evidenced the clusters and examples below:

**Delivery Issues**

- Update the due dates on the assignments (there was a glitch and all of them were due on May 23, making every submission appear late).
- I really wish I had taken this class on campus and not online. I think the quilt was a great idea and the discussion would have been much more meaningful in person.
- Consistency throughout GSU in the use of GaView

**Organization, Structure and Instructor Preparation**

- Even though the material was highly organized, the class material was confusing as there was lots of material on the GaView website.
- This course was extremely organized.
- The modules were set up to lead you from one activity to the next.
- The work was genuinely helpful- everything pertained to the class and none was busy work.
- Author was very well prepared. She quickly responded to any e-mails or concerns I had.
- Author enjoys what she teaches, and has good structured activities and materials for us to learn the content through.

**Specific Course Activities**

- I liked that this course/instructor gave me a variety of learning experiences. From the interview project to the class discussions, I learned more about the importance of culture in the classroom, as well as more about myself as a future teacher.
- I liked that she put up an introductory video for us to watch so I could put a name with a face (being the class was completely online).
- The use of outside resources was very helpful in connection with our text.
- I loved the videos that you implemented instead of just the readings and immigrant interview project.
- [Add] more videos that correlate with readings

**Module Evaluation Written Comments.** In some respects, the module and end-of-course evaluations mirror each other. They both provided information indicating that students liked a “quick” and “timely” response and that the instructor is “enthusiastic” and “enjoys” the course. Data from both evaluations indicate that students perceive the structure, organization, and design of the course as beneficial overall.

- I found the design/order of assignments relevant and continuously building toward the next assignment. (2010, M4, R7).
- Author enjoys what she teaches, and has good structured activities and materials for us to learn the content through (End-of-Course evaluation).

**Table 1 below shows the number of responses from across the four course modules that are related to specific course activities.**

*Course specific activities and the frequency of references*

Course Activities (46/49 respondents)	Liked Least	Liked Best
Textbook /Notes /PPT Presentations (Modules 1-4)	0	3
Immigrant Interview and Analysis (Module 4)	0	9
Movie Analysis (Module 3)	0	11
Interactive Online Activities (Module 1)	1	18
Personal Reflections/Journals (Modules 1-4)	1	3
Class Discussions (Modules 1-4)	0	12
Annotated Glossary with Examples (Module 1)	28	2
Research Paper and Application Paper (Graduate only)	3	0
Culturally Responsive School Assessment (Module 2)	0	2
Analysis of Legislation (Module 3)	3	2
Website: EdChange (Module 2)	0	15
Videos** (Modules 1-4)	3	39
Propositions for CLDS/Top Ten (Module 4)	0	10

\*\* Sometimes students did not name the specific course video and/or referred to “the videos” in the module evaluations. Thus, this category includes references to all course assigned videos.

In addition to providing a higher percentage of respondents, students also provided more supporting details in the module evaluations. The responses in the module evaluations showed patterns across the course as it developed rather than a summative snapshot. Simultaneously, they offer a clearer picture of students' overall response to the course. The module evaluations offered a higher number of responses and more details about course specific activity. Table 1 indicates that students found the videos beneficial to their learning. The interactive online activities and movie analysis were also positively cited by students. Students also liked the top ten assignments and the immigrant interview project. Twenty-eight students either did not like or would change the annotated glossary assignment. This was the least liked activity to students overall. The culturally responsive school assessment plan did not appear to be of great value in enriching students' learning. While only three of the students commented on the graduate application paper, they were in agreement that the assignment should be better integrated into the course. While the Immigrant/Migrant Interview & Analysis (Module 4) is only listed as most liked by nine only, in a related project, an analysis of key learning and their sources indicated that student drew heavily on this project. This reinforced the fact that data are to be derived from multiple points and examined in a variety of ways in order to inform teaching and learning in meaningful ways.

**Insights gleaned from the module evaluations.** The integration of movies, videos, and documentaries represented the most cited category of responses and the students perceived it as an important part of their learning.

I liked the movie analysis (and incorporating it into the discussion). It made everyone look at movies in a different way (2011, M3, R6).

Before this class, I never thought about how many times I see racial stereotypes in movies, especially Disney, and don't even notice it (2011, M1, R3).



I definitely learned a lot about classing people and about the media's role in stereotyping, which is sad. I am glad I had my eyes open in this module and I am now able to analyze more when watching films (2011, M1, R8).

1. The annotated bibliography is listed the least liked course activity and one that requires clarity.

I would have liked at least a generic example of an annotated glossary. It would have been nice to see how to format it since I have never written an annotated glossary and was not able to find an example online (2011, M1, R9).

I would add more directions to the Annotated Glossary assignment. As a graduate student who has spent numerous hours finding peer reviewed sources, I definitely was overthinking this assignment initially (2010, M1, R5).

2. The top-ten assignment, in which students came up with a proposition for working with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students (CLDS) based on their learning in the course, is considered to be personally meaningful learning opportunity.

I enjoyed the top ten assignment! I thought that it made for an excellent end to the class in that it helped summarize what we all as individuals are taking away from the class (2011, M4, R4).

I really loved completing the top-ten assignment. I think that I will print it and post my "tips" in my classroom (2010, M4, R4).

3. The immigrant interview project, although the assignment students dreaded the most, provided the most impassioned comments. This assignment requires that students interviewed someone who learned English as a second language and complete an analysis of the interview in the context of the status quo and the literature. Students had anxiety about finding and interviewing someone. However, in the end they noted that it was a rich part of their learning experience.

I LOVED LOVED LOVED the immigrant interview. When I first saw we had to do this for an online class, I was not pleased. Now I can't imagine NOT doing this. LOVED IT (2011, M4, R6)!

My favorite assignments were the immigrant interview and the Top Ten. I truly appreciated going through these assignments considering this an opportunity to voice my own thinking to myself and what I may share in the future with my school community (2010, M4, R7).

4. The graduate students suggest combining two assignments into one in order to alleviate “stress” and “save time.”

The research paper does need to be aligned somehow with the project (2010, M4, R14).

. . . . . What would have been more useful is to combine the interview project and graduate research so that, in addition to the project as assigned, the grad students would add a section of research about immigrant education correlating the analysis of the interview to research . . . . (2010, M4, R6).

Analysis of the written comments has provided a starting point for making decisions about the course. There is evidence of that the course organization and structure worked well for students; they enjoyed learning through visual media; and found the top ten assignment and immigrant interview project to be meaningful learning opportunities. It is also clear that at least two activities, the annotated bibliography and the graduate capstone paper are candidates for improvement or removal from the course. Notably absent from the evaluations are the textbook and the case studies and vignettes in them, as well as court cases that were analyzed for implications for CLDS. Thus, other artifacts from the course will have to speak to this area. However, based on students' response to media, proving case studies in that format is worth exploring. This from the evaluations along with data gathered from analysis of written assignments and journals will inform decisions about the course revision. Students' perception, in

concert with analysis of actual learning, is integral to the revision of courses to improve teaching and learning.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Sorting through the written comments provides information about concepts developed in the course and the teaching learning activities that supported them. Analysis of the written comments on course evaluations offers information that is not evident in the descriptive statistics of the survey portions. Module evaluations, in particular, yielded a higher completion rate and information about specific course activities, in greater details, than end-of-course evaluations. As such, module evaluation is a valuable source of data in the evaluation of teaching and learning and the redesign of courses to improve student learning. However, the module evaluations are not summative, and as such, students may not always reflect comparisons across activities and the course overall, as may be evident in the end-of-course evaluations. In the end-of-course evaluations, it was affirming to see students' notes about the course's organization and structure, the timeliness of communication and the instructor's enthusiasm. As such, this is not an argument to replace end-of-course evaluations with module evaluations. Rather, this study supports the use of multiple methods and purports that module evaluations are particularly useful in revising a course to improve teaching and learning. While current study findings confirm previous research including overall comments about things that were beyond the instructor's control and summative judgments on the course overall (Adams, 1997; Armstrong, 1998; Donovan, Mader, & Shinsky, 2006), it affirms that analysis of students' written comments yield useful information for improving teaching and learning (Lewis, 1991). Further, analysis of formative evaluations, such as module evaluations, can be used by faculty to improve areas of weakness identified in their annual evaluation or pre tenure evaluation. Faculty can design specific questions to gather feedback on targeted areas, analyze the feedback, adjust their teaching, and continue the cycle. The process can be documented as evidence of actions to improve targeted areas.

There was no evidence that in the absence of module evaluations, students offer greater specificity and depth of comments on their end-of-course student ratings of instruction. In fact, end-of-course comments for the study group more details and specificity than the reference group. Perhaps by completing module evaluations, students are better able to offer more informed comments on the end-of-

course evaluation. This could be examined. Further study is needed on the use of module evaluations in other courses and faculty and students' perceptions of the value of module evaluations in the overall teaching and learning process. At a minimum, it would be interesting to see how widely module evaluations are administered and how the data are utilized. Module evaluations are one tool that those oriented toward SoTL scholars can harness as they work to improve their teaching and their students' learning.

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## **An Investigation of Course Requirements and Student Motivation to Complete Required Readings**

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### **Abstract**

Many instructors note student failure to read required texts prior to attending class. This study investigated how instructor utilization of assigned readings interacts with student beliefs about the relationship between assigned readings and success in a course. Beginning-of-the-program teacher candidates were from a lower level undergraduate education class where quizzes were directly related to the reading material. End-of-the-program teacher candidates were from an upper level undergraduate education class where activities and discussions in this class were directly related to the reading material. Graduate-level practitioners were from a graduate class in special education where required online class discussions in this class were directly related to the reading material. Beginning-of-the-program teacher candidates and the graduate-level practitioners reported high rates of completing the required reading. Results from the end-of-the-program teacher candidate group were used to revise the course delivery.

## **Introduction**

Most college instructors consider assigned outside-of-class reading to be an integral part of the academic experience. Research has shown that students who complete assigned readings show a greater understanding of instructors' lectures, participate more often in discussion and perform better on exams (Sappington, Kinsey, & Munsayac, 2002). On the other hand, inadequate preparation for class activities and discussion can impede student learning to a considerable degree (Nilson, 1998). Although assigned readings may be highly valued by faculty, students do not necessarily value them. Burchfield and Sappington (2000) have reported that on any given day, only one-third of all students will have completed the assigned readings for any particular class. Similarly, Clump, Bauer and Bradley (2004) found that students in psychology classes on average read 27% of the assigned readings before class and 70% before an exam. Even though instructors and academically-strong students know that willingness to read the related material before it is covered in class produces better learning outcomes (Phillips & Phillips, 2007), the reality is that the majority of students do not read what is assigned as confirmed by a number of studies (Clump, 2004; Clump & Doll, 2007; Marchant, 2002) as well as the regular complaints of instructors that students have not even bothered to purchase the text.

There are many reasons for student noncompliance with completion of required reading including reading comprehension deficits (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006; Leamson, 1999), variations in the amount of assigned reading (Bradley, 2007), and lack of time management skills (Barnett, 1998; Maher & Mitchell, 2010). Lack of motivation due to student belief that the readings are not tied directly to the content taught and assessed in class (Brost & Bradley, 2006) or that it is possible to receive a passing grade in the course without reading (Broz, 2011) are also possible explanations for student noncompliance. Nolen (1996) suggests that lack of congruence between instructor goals and student goals leads to failure to complete assigned readings. Most instructors espouse mastery goals related to increasing skills and competence. When a student's goal is the same, he/she will have a strong motivation to complete activities such as assigned readings that engage and challenge him/her. Such a student demonstrates what Dweck (1999) calls a "growth mindset" that perceives challenges as opportunities to grow. However, if a student has a performance goal of merely passing a class and he/she believes this can be achieved without engaging with the readings because the instructor uses



class time to summarize and interpret the text, he/she has no motivation to read the assigned texts (Derryberry & Wininger, 2008).

A number of studies have indicated that quizzes covering the material in the text increase student motivation to complete assigned readings. Conner-Greene (2000) found that students reported enhanced learning with the use of daily essay quizzes. Sappington, et al. (2002) demonstrated a positive relationship between scores on pop quizzes (indicating out-of-class preparation) and final exam scores. Additionally, Carney, Fry, Gabriele, and Ballard (2008) found that the use of Monte Carlo quizzes and non-random quizzes as well as learning logs all increased the amount of assigned reading completed. Lastly, Johnson and Kiviniemi (2009) reported that the use of online quizzes taken before class raises student comprehension as measured by achievement of subsequent exams. Recent work by Berry, Cook, Hill, & Stevens (2011) indicates that students want instructors to direct their attention to what is key in the readings. This can be done by providing reading questions (Henderson & Rosenthal, 2006), requiring student generation of questions (Van Blerkom, Van Blerkom, & Bertsch, 2006), having students use the SQ3R method as they read (Artis, 2008), requiring student summaries of assigned materials (Peterson, 2006) or having students use a self-monitoring system (Chang, 2010). Any of these strategies along with being assessed on the material may produce even higher rates of compliance with reading assignments and better student learning outcomes.

### **Statement of the problem**

Students need to be motivated, whether intrinsically by the desire to learn the material or extrinsically by grades to read the assigned material. Regardless of student perception, the instructor of these courses believed these readings were essential for student success and would lead to a greater ability to apply the factual information, concepts and strategies covered in each of these classes and in their careers as educators. This study investigated how instructor utilization of assigned readings interacted with student beliefs about the relationship between assigned readings and success in a course to influence student behavior. The effectiveness of three strategies (directed at three different student populations) for increasing student motivation to comply with course reading requirements was examined over the course of a semester.

## Methods

**Participants.** All participants were enrolled in a teacher preparation program at a mid-sized Midwestern liberal arts university. Students from three different classes participated in the research.

### *Beginning-of-the-program teacher candidates.*

Participants were from a lower-level undergraduate education class, “Introduction to Learners with Exceptionalities” (EDUC 2900). This is a required course for all education majors. Most of the students were sophomores and considered beginning-of-the-program teacher candidates. There were 19 students originally enrolled in the class; 18 students completed the class. This section included half of all students enrolled in the course this particular semester. Students selected which class section to participate based on their scheduling logistics. All students consented to participate in anonymous surveys throughout the class related to required readings and quiz performance. The quizzes in this class constituted 15% of each student’s final grade.

### *End-of-the-program teacher candidates.*

Participants were from an upper-level undergraduate education class, “Behavior Management” (EDUC 3375). This is a required course for all education majors. All of the students were seniors and were considered end-of-the-program teacher candidates. There were 18 students enrolled in the class. This section included all students enrolled in the course this particular semester. All students consented to participate in anonymous surveys throughout the class related to required readings and group work. Assignments contributed to each student’s ability to complete the final project, but were not graded.

### *Graduate-level practitioners.*

Participants were from a graduate class in special education, “Assessment of Functional Skills in Students with Severe Developmental Disabilities” (SPED 5313). All students were practicing teachers. There were 10 students originally enrolled in the class; nine students completed the class, one student took an incomplete and completed the course at a later date without responding to the online discussion threads. This section included all students enrolled in the course this particular semester. All students consented to participate in anonymous surveys throughout the class related to required readings and

posted discussion threads. Discussion postings in this class constituted 10% of each student's final grade.

**Survey Administration.** Surveys varied by group but all surveys required circling a response and provided no identifying information. Surveys for the first two groups were folded in half and placed in a large manila envelope by the students. Students who chose not to participate simply folded the form in half and placed it in the envelope. The envelope was sealed by a participant at the end of class. The researcher was not able to determine if a student had chosen to participate or not. The graduate-level practitioners received a short survey form by mail at the beginning and end of the course. It was accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope. None of the surveys were viewed by the researcher until the end of the semester after grades had been posted. A sample survey from each group is provided in Appendix A.

*Beginning-of-the-program teacher candidates.*

In EDUC 2900, quizzes were directly related to the reading material. Students were asked to fill out 15 short survey forms throughout the course. The first survey asked if the student had the textbook and if they typically complete required readings. The next 14 surveys took place after an online quiz had been completed outside of class time. These surveys asked if the students had taken the quiz, if they had read the required material prior to taking the quiz, if they had used the posted quiz bank questions to assist with their reading, and if they believed the answers they had just given influenced the grade they had received on the quiz. These multiple-choice quizzes with Bloom's taxonomy application level questions were taken after one week of lecture on a topic. The last survey asked the students to estimate what percentage of the required readings they had completed and to indicate their average quiz grade (0-10).

*End-of-the-program teacher candidates.*

In EDUC 3375 class activities/discussions were directly related to the reading material. Students were asked to fill out six short survey forms throughout the course. The first survey asked if the students had the textbook and if they typically complete required readings. The next four surveys took place after a related class activity/discussion has been completed during class time. These surveys asked if the students had read the required material prior to the class period and if they believed the answer they had just given influenced their ability to participate in the small group activity/discussion. These activities and

discussions were related to the subsections of the students' final projects. The last survey asked the students to estimate what percentage of the required readings they had completed and to what degree they believed that it had influenced their final class grade. (Students in this class knew their final grade by the last day of class.)

In SPED 5311, required online class discussions were directly related to the reading material. Students were mailed a short survey form at the beginning and end of the course. The first survey asked if the students had the textbook/access to the articles and if they typically complete required readings. The syllabus in this class indicated that online postings were graded according to a rubric that addresses quantity of responses (i.e., initial post and a response to a classmates post were the minimum requirement) and quality of responses (i.e., relevance to the topic, reference to the reading, reflection of one's own classroom experience). The last survey asked the students to estimate what percentage of the required readings they had completed and to what degree they believed that it had influenced their discussion grade.

## Results

### *Beginning-of-the-program Teacher Candidates*

In survey one, 17 of 18 students indicated that they had the required text. In response to the question, "Do you typically complete assigned readings?" students responded as shown below:

**Figure 1: Perception of Completing Assigned Readings**

Always	Most of the time	Half of The time	Not Often	Never
7	4	5	2	0

Here we see a discrepancy between faculty and student perceptions of reading related to how students view their overall study habits.

In surveys 2 through 15, the average response to the question, "To what degree do you believe reading or not reading the material influenced your grade on this quiz?" students responded as shown below:

**Figure 2: Perception of Reading Influence on Quiz Score**

A Great Deal	Somewhat	A Little	Not At All
11-12	2-3	1-2	1

These results show that students' perceptions may be influenced by instructor connection of reading compliance and assessment.

In survey 16 in response to the question "What percentage of required readings would you say you completed during this course?" students responded as shown below:

**Figure 3: Percentage of Readings Completed**

0	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
2	0	0	1	0	0	1	2	2	4	3

In survey 16 in response to the question "What was your average quiz grade?" students responded as shown below:

**Figure 4: Average Quiz Grades**

0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
2	0	0	1	0	0	1	2	2	4	3

Student class performance and average quiz grades are shown below:

**Figure 5: Class Performance and Average Quiz Grades**

Student	Average quiz grade	Course grade
1	9.8	A
2	9.5	A
3	9.5	A
4	9.5	A
5	9.4	B
6	9.1	A

7	9.1	A
8	8.8	B
9	8.8	A
10	8.6	B
11	8.5	C
12	8.3	A
13	8.2	B
14	8.1	W
15	7.9	A
16	7.8	F
17	7.6	C
18	6.9	A
19	6.7	B

There appears to be a slight relationship between reading and final grades, but quizzes were only 15% of the grade and due to the fact that individual grades could not be linked to specific survey responses, it is difficult to conclude that the quizzes predicted grades.

#### *End-of-the-program Teacher Candidates*

In survey 1, 14 of 18 students indicated that they had the required text. In response to the question, "Do you typically complete assigned readings?" students responded as shown below:

**Figure 6: Perception of Completing Assigned Readings**

Always	Most of the time	Half of The time	Not Often	Never
1	10	5	2	0

These students demonstrate their prior learning that in most cases the professor will lecture reducing their need to read. As a result of this learning, they may have entered the course with perceptions that reading was necessary.

In surveys two through five the average response to the question, “To what degree do you believe reading or not reading the material affected your ability to effectively participate in today’s discussion/activity?” Students responded as shown below:

**Figure 7: Perception of Reading Influence on Discussion/Activity Participation**

A Great Deal	Somewhat	A Little	Not At All
1-2	6	6	4

In contrast to the strong connections made between reading and quizzes by the beginning-of-the-program candidates, the looser, non-graded requirements did not create a strong connection between reading and performance for the end-of-the-program candidates.

In survey six in response to the question “What percentage of required readings would you say you completed during this course?” students responded as shown below:

**Figure 8: Percentage of Readings Completed**

0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
2	1	4	2	2	0	0	2	0	2	2

These results show that a reduced emphasis on the connection between reading and graded performance may increase noncompliance.

In survey six in response to the question “To what degree do you believe reading or not reading the material influence your final grade in this class?” students responded as shown below:

**Figure 9: Perception of Reading Influence on Final Grade**

A Great Deal	Somewhat	A Little	Not At All
3	4	5	5

One-third of the final grade was based on each student’s final project. Grades were distributed as shown below:

**Figure 10: Final Grades for end-of-the-program teacher candidates**

C	C+	B-	B+	A-	A
1	0	0	1	1	15

Without some portion of the grade being directly tied to an assessment of their reading, the students did not attribute success in the course to reading compliance.

#### *Graduate-level Practitioners*

For survey 1, there were 10 respondents. Seven out of eight students indicated that they had easy access to the readings. Eight students indicated that they had experience posting to an online discussion. In response to the question, “Do you typically complete assigned readings?” students responded as shown below:

**Figure 11: Perception of Completing Assigned Readings**

Always	Most of the time	Half of The time	Not Often	Never
5	2	3	0	0

For survey two, there were seven respondents. In response to the question “What percentage of required readings would you say you completed during this course?” students responded as shown below:

**Figure 12: Percentage of Readings Completed**

0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	4

The high percentage of reading compliance in this group reflects the students' perceptions that the readings were important.

For survey two in response to the question, “To what degree do you believe reading or not reading the material influenced your final grade in this class?” students responded as shown below:



**Figure 13: Perception of Reading Influence on Final Grade**

A Great Deal	Somewhat	A Little	Not At All
3	3	1	0

With the high perception of compliance, student attribution of success in the course to completing assigned reading is predictable.

Online postings were rated on a four-point scale with three being proficient and four being advanced. Student performance was distributed as shown below:

**Figure 14: Proficiency Ratings for Online Postings for Graduate-level Practitioners**

1 Unsatisfactory	2 Nearing proficiency	3 Proficient	3.5	4 Advanced
0	0	2	1	7

Grades for the 10 students in this class were distributed as follows: Eight students received an A, one student received a B and one student received an incomplete.

## Discussion

Beginning-of-the-program teacher candidates took quizzes over required readings as one means to assess learning. Along with a direct relationship between quizzes and readings, two-thirds of the class believed that completing the readings influenced their grades a great deal; this was probably the same two-thirds of the class who indicated that they completed 70-100% of the required reading. One student remarked, "The weekly quizzes forced me to read material and know information." Such comments indicate that the quizzes provided extrinsic motivation to complete the readings which further reinforces the position of Sappington et al. (2002) that students have a responsibility to prepare for class and instructors have a responsibility to make clear that success is tied to preparation. These results also suggest that the background knowledge students gained as a result of the readings improved overall performance across all assessment, not just the quizzes on readings.

With the end-of-the-program teacher candidates, participation in ungraded group discussions and activities related to required reading was evaluated to see if it was related to success in the course. Activities included group completion of graphic organizers, case studies and simulations. One-half of the

class believed that completing the readings affected their participation in group discussions and activities somewhat or a great deal. One-third of the class completed 70-100% of the required reading. There was no identifiable relationship between reading and final grades. As observed by Brost and Bradley (2006) and Broz (2011), the lack of an explicit connection being articulated between readings and success in the course may have led to the students' noncompliance.

Grades of the graduate-level practitioners related to posted discussion threads on required reading were evaluated to see if they were related to success in the course. All students completed 80-100% of the required reading. Two-thirds of the class believed that completing the readings affected their participation in discussion threads and activities somewhat or a great deal, although the discussion threads only accounted for 10% of the final grade. The readings did address major course topics and provided examples of how the strategies presented could be implemented in the classroom. Specific prompts such as "The Criterion of Ultimate Functioning (Brown, Nietupski, & Nietupski, 1976) was written over 30 years ago. The authors set out a wonderful vision for individuals with severe developmental disabilities. How far have we come in meeting that vision? Are we providing instruction that is designed to help our students meet the criterion of ultimate functioning? If not, why not? What are the barriers?" encouraged students to think about how they might apply the concepts learned in their own classrooms. Comments by students in this class indicated that they were highly motivated to read the material in order to gain the knowledge whether or not it was related to their grades. One student indicated "The material was stuff I could use in my classroom NOW."

### **Implications for Practice**

This research suggests that explicit connections must be made between assigned readings and utility for the student. In the two groups that showed high compliance, one group had the extrinsic motivation of being able to successfully complete the quizzes and the other had the intrinsic motivation of being able to directly apply the material read to their teaching the next day. Beginning-of-the-program candidates received immediate feedback as to their knowledge related to the topic covered in a specific chapter. Unlike the online quizzes given by Johnson and Kiviniemi (2009), these quizzes were given after assigned readings were to be completed and lecture was completed and students were encouraged to apply the information learned rather than memorize facts. The survey fostered metacognitive activity

leading to students making a connection between their effort and strategies (e.g. reading the chapter, taking notes) and quiz grade. Likewise, the participants in the graduate course received feedback, first from their classmates when they posted responses indicating how they would apply the reading in their classroom setting and second, from their own students as they implemented new strategies.

The group that read the least indicated that they were able to complete required activities based on information presented in lecture or from general background knowledge. As suggested by Derryberry and Wininger, (2008), the instructor's practice of summarizing and interpreting the text prior to the introduction of class activities related to applying the concepts, had a negative effect on the students engaging in required reading. Based on this feedback, this course was redesigned using student-led seminars and conceptual workshops as outlined by Finkel (1999) in order to provide explicit connections between readings, in-class activities, and out-of-class summative assessments.

Instructors who believe that reading the text allows students to access and use valuable discipline-specific content must create learning environments that connect the readings to either in-class experiences or out-of-class applications. Establishing the utility value of completing assigned readings is the first step in assuring student compliance in this area.

### **Future Research**

In the future, these interventions to increase student compliance with required reading should be examined by applying them across multiple sections of a course with some sections not receiving intervention and being used as control groups. Additionally, different interventions can be compared cross-sectionally among similar groups of students. Lastly, measures that clearly tie required reading to assignments and course grades need to be utilized.

### **Limitations**

Students participating in this study may not be representative of all learners as they were all education majors. Additionally, the study's generalizability is limited because of the small number of participants in each condition. Lastly, results may be confounded by additional variables such as students' personal time constraints, learning aptitude, and motivation that were not measured.

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## Appendix A

Group 1 Survey 2

Did you take the quiz?                      Y              N

Did you complete the assigned reading before taking the quiz?    Y              N

Did you use the posted quiz questions to guide your reading?    Y              N

To what degree do you believe your reading/not reading the material influenced your grade on this quiz?

A great deal                      Somewhat                      A little                      Not at all

To what degree do you believe your use of the posted quiz questions influenced your grade on this quiz?

A great deal                      Somewhat                      A little                      Not at all

Group 2 Survey 2

Did you complete the assigned reading before the class activity/discussion?    Y      N

To what degree do you believe your reading/not reading the material affected your ability to effectively participate in today's discussion/activity?

A great deal                      Somewhat                      A little                      Not at all

Group 3 Survey 2

What percentage of the required readings would you say you completed during this course?

0%      10%      20%      30%      40%      50%      60%      70%      80%      90%      100%

To what degree do you believe your reading/not reading the material influenced your final grade in this class?

A great deal                      Somewhat                      A little                      Not at all

**Celebrate Teaching and Learning: A SoTL Symposium at the University of the Pacific**

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**Abstract**

This paper presents a faculty-driven teaching and learning celebration that fostered institutional cultural change. The symposium showcased exemplar instructional methods at an institution, whose mission is to “to provide a superior, student-centered learning experience integrating liberal arts and professional education.” The symposium was a grass-roots effort that attracted seventy-two faculty members from various disciplines to attend the four day symposium sessions to share, discuss, and learn about the best practices used by their colleagues. The overall evaluation and response to the symposium exceeded the expectations of the organizers. The paper contributes to both the scholarship of teaching and learning and institutional cultural change literature by providing an overview of the program, reflections on the endeavor, and four successful presentations that helped to foster an interdisciplinary community of practice committed to sustainable pedagogies.



## **Introduction**

Over the last thirty years, higher education has seen a dramatic shift in student demographics (Vardi, 2011) and accreditation standards (Rogers, 2012) that requires educators to reconsider our individual and university practices to adapt to the new student and political reality. Institutions of higher learning may need to consider organizational changes to better align practices towards these new, dynamic stakeholders. To facilitate an institutional cultural change that is more responsive requires an opportunity for self-discovery, fostered by change agents, to bring about a re-alignment of individual and organizational identity, guided by the mission of the institution (Ginsberg & Bernstein, 2011). In our case, the University of the Pacific's mission is, "to provide a superior, student-centered learning experience integrating liberal arts and professional education and preparing individuals for lasting achievement and responsible leadership in their careers and communities." Based on our mission, the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) provides a means and opportunity of developing communities of practice in higher education institutions to better facilitate the transformation of how we teach, why we teach, and who we teach (Becker & Andrews, 2011; Gilpin & Liston, 2009). To better connect our individual teaching practices with our institutional student-centered mission required engaging faculty passion for teaching and fostering an engaged community of practice around teaching and learning (Becker & Andrews, 2011; Gilpin & Liston, 2009; Simmons, 2009). Our hope was to lay the foundation for an institutional cultural shift, by developing sustainable pedagogies (Veel & Bredhauer, 2009) and an interdisciplinary network (Colbert, 2012) through a Celebration of Teaching and Learning.

To begin the process of fostering institutional cultural change, a framework for individual and organization self-discovery is necessary. At Pacific, this came about initially as a small group of faculty who wanted to share innovative pedagogy, but through the process of collaboration, transformed into a planning committee that organized a weeklong Celebration of Teaching and Learning. The symposium focused on a series of sharing studios to facilitate communities of practice focused on sustainable teaching and learning pedagogies. The four-day symposium included twelve faculty presentations and seventy-two faculty participants. The contributions included in this manuscript were drawn from these exemplary sessions in an effort to highlight scholarly teaching (Richlin & Cox, 2004) and to demonstrate our own efforts toward institutional cultural change.

The symposium was a unique endeavor for the institution for a number of reasons. First, the effort started not from a center or administrative office, but rather from a gathering of faculty change agents who expressed an interest in coordinating a grass-roots effort to foster teaching and learning. Unlike other university sponsored events, the symposium began as a faculty discussion the summer prior about how best to share what they had learned in terms of effective classroom techniques. Although the university later provided some administrative and financial support, the driving force was the faculty, drawn from different disciplines, who wanted to foster a greater dialogue regarding scholarly teaching. Second, although the mission of the school was primarily teaching, there had been limited attempts at driving an institutional culture that fostered teaching. In fact, the opposite was occurring, with the push by external accrediting bodies toward greater scholarship, sometime at the expense of teaching. The university had never held a teaching conference, our Center for Teaching and Learning was newly established, and there had been limited focus on either the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning or even just scholarly teaching. Third, the impetus for the symposium and the subsequent manuscript was a response to the tradition of bringing in named speakers to help 'educate' faculty on best practice. The focus instead, was on building sustainable pedagogies from within, using our own interdisciplinary community toward the beginning phases of organizational change. Although outside expertise may be helpful at times, we felt that as an institution, one that prides itself on whole person education, that there was enough credible talent, techniques and interest in focusing our symposium on the work of our own faculty. If as an institution, we want to embrace the principles of student-focused education, and bring about an cultural shift toward teaching and learning, than what better way to start, than to come together as equals to share our own classroom narratives with the hope of building teaching excellence through collaborative sharing of ideas. Therefore, rather than rely on administrative support or external assistance from others, we realized that collectively we had the influence, passion, and knowledge to begin the process of change.

The goal of the symposium was to develop a network of faculty interested in scholarly teaching. The process was a forum to highlighting effective teaching and active learning practices which could be shared amongst colleagues. Our strategy began as a small, but necessary step to build a community dedicated to scholarly teaching and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning through a process dubbed

“short shots” by Simmons (2009). That is, although the conference itself ended up as a high impact endeavor, it was the small event leading up to the symposium that made the difference. From the formation of the conference committee, the call for proposals and reviewers, the review process, the conference implementation, and the one-on-one discussion that occurred before, during and after the sessions that really drove the change efforts.

Our focus was the formation of an interdisciplinary learning community that extended beyond our pedagogical and intellectual silos. The symposium provided a platform to assist in the formation of a broader professional teaching and learning network, the opportunity to share best practices, showcase collaborative work, report on student learning outcomes and connect with like-minded colleagues. A network that extended beyond the barriers of our disciplines that often prevent effective communication, into a shared space of collective practice, not just as passive observers but as active participants. In sum, the beginnings of an interdisciplinary network within the institution to provide faculty a space in which to share their experiences and feel support in their teaching, which exemplifies the teaching mission of Pacific.

In our case, the hope was that the introduction of a collaborative symposium on teaching and learning would help to foster sustainable pedagogies by sharing our own unique classroom experiences. Sustainable pedagogy is the “establishment of collaborative learning cultures that encourage risk-taking, exploration of ideas and learning” (White, 2008, p. 6). The characteristics of sustainable pedagogy include a holistic view of teaching, collaborative learning culture, achievement of learning targets, focus on teacher-learner relationships, recognition of the need for reflection, exploration of ideas, and risk-taking behavior (Veel & Bredhauer, 2009). It was through the interactive sessions where sustainable pedagogy emerged, as faculty were exposed to different methods, developed new skills, and reflected on their own learning. The symposium itself served as the means whereby sustainable pedagogy could emerge.

To build a sustainable pedagogy requires the development of an interdisciplinary professional teaching and learning network within the institution (Colbert, 2012; Lewis & Zelinsky, 1987). In general, teaching can often be a solitary work that requires faculty to work independently, isolated from colleagues, and without a lot of meaningful opportunities to reflect on our work with others. The

symposium offered an opportunity for faculty from all areas of the campus to gather together to present and discuss teaching strategies, learn new pedagogies, and foster a community of practice to support collaborative learning and offer participants the opportunity to co-construct learning activities (Parker & Chao, 2007). If the sessions themselves allowed for the consideration of sustainable pedagogy, it was the entire symposium process, from planning to implementation to review, that helped to facilitate a broader learning network.

Overall, the symposium was an opportunity to promote organizational self-discovery and engage faculty as change agents in the process. The subsequent collection of session detailed in the manuscript are intended to help disseminate information on best practices, to inspire others to consider their own teaching techniques that further the goal of student learning, and to recognize the contributions of institutions whose mission is largely teaching-oriented to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in higher education. Similar to the expectations of other local conferences of teaching and learning, our hope was that our planners, presenters and attendees would help to foster a community of engagement that would reconsider the role of educators in this new dynamic environment (Davis, Watkins & Allen, 2009; Haley, Wiessner, & Robinson, 2009).

## **Method**

The challenge was to bring faculty and practices out of individual classrooms and into the broader university community to share, discuss, and uncover best practices that are occurring right now by fellow faculty members. In an attempt to overcome the physical and psychological barriers of sharing our own creative teaching and learning methods that excite students and educators, the University of the Pacific embarked on a call for proposals from faculty for faculty, that can be demonstrated through a series of hands-on experiential active sessions. The main criterion for submission was for faculty to consider whatever they do in the classroom that excites and inspires students.

Each session engaged other faculty members for either a 30 or 60 minute block, with the expectation that faculty will demonstrate their techniques, so that other faculty members can replicate the methods in their own classrooms. Submissions were blind peer-reviewed by two faculty members, focusing on interest to faculty, clear student learning outcomes, appropriate, clear methods, and




demonstrating significant results. The recommendations for acceptance, revision, or rejection were sent to an action team made up of faculty who made the final determination of acceptance.

## **Results**



The symposium itself and the subsequent collection of insights provide evidence that exemplary teaching is happening across levels in higher education. Our main goals were to showcase internal effective teaching and learning methods, raise awareness of SoTL, and to further develop faculty. The symposium as a whole as well as the specific articles enclosed, highlight active and collaborative learning techniques that we believe help to foster student engagement. The contributions are (1) “Beyond our gates: Mobilizing experiential learning opportunities in physical education teacher preparation programs” by Lara Killick, Darrin Kitchen, and Gina Carbonatto, that focused on experiential learning opportunities and community partnerships being developed through Pacific’s Sport Pedagogy curricula; (2) “The whacky world of wikis” by Delores McNair that focused on the use of the wiki tool to support student work in the classroom; (3) “Thinking on your feet: Collaboration between business and forensics” by Chris Sablynski, that focused on using debate as an in-class teaching activity for conflict management; and (4) “Case studies to foster student research innovation through learning from nature” by Henghu Sun and Yuan Yao, that focused on fostering students innovation through “learning-from-nature” case studies. The purpose of the collection of contributions was to provide a template for active learning techniques that are occurring in class that others may want to consider, and to demonstrate the range of innovative techniques to foster student engagement.

To assess the impact of the symposium attendees were asked to complete a brief online survey that focused on engagement, teaching and learning, and recommendation. Out of the 72 participants, 24 responded to the survey.





## 1. Engaging in this Symposium was valuable to my teaching and learning

1. Engaging in this Symposium was valuable to my teaching and learning.			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Disagree		0.0%	0
Disagree		4.2%	1
Agree		29.2%	7
Strongly Agree		66.7%	16
Optional Comments			4
answered question			24
skipped question			0

## 2. I will use ideas from the Symposium in my teaching and learning.

2. I will use ideas from the Symposium in my teaching and learning.			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Disagree		0.0%	0
Disagree		0.0%	0
Agree		50.0%	12
Strongly Agree		50.0%	12
Optional Comments			6
answered question			24
skipped question			0

## 3. I would recommend this Symposium to my colleagues.

3. I would recommend this Symposium to my colleagues.			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Disagree		4.3%	1
Disagree		4.3%	1
Agree		26.1%	6
Strongly Agree		65.2%	15
Optional Comments			4
answered question			23
skipped question			1

Although the response rate was fairly low (33%), the consistency of “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” across the questions and respondents provides preliminary evidence that overall, the symposium was valuable, that information may be transferred, and that participants would recommend the symposium. In other words, the survey helps demonstrate that participants were actively engaged in the process.

Perhaps more importantly, as elaborated in each contribution, are the personal reflections of the authors and the recorded reactions of the participants from each session. In particular four themes emerged from the various sessions: (a) the benefit for the presenters; (b) the lasting effects of the sessions; (c) opportunity for discussion; and (d) the consistent comments regarding the value of the symposium. These themes provide further evidence of not just engagement in the process, but toward our overall goal of beginning to develop a framework for a community of engagement around teaching and learning.

## **Discussion**

Our Celebration of Teaching and Learning Symposium was a grass-roots efforts to change institutional culture toward scholarly teaching and SoTL through the development of sustainable pedagogies and the building of an interdisciplinary teaching and learning networks within the university. Given Pacific’s unique three campus, one university model with several professional schools, our hands-on event with 12 presentations and 72 faculty participants was a successful first step. First, as indicated in the results, participants found the event to be both valuable and useful with support for continuing the process. Second, as indicated by the experience of attendees, the event helped to foster discussions and reflections about teaching and learning across disciplines on campus. Third, as indicated in the subsequent paper sessions, there was a commitment to active, integrative learning through our program.

Our initial focus was to bring together faculty to share their own active learning strategies with colleagues, but in the end, what we discovered was that the process of bringing together a group of faculty across disciplines and programs provided an opportunity to move beyond a conference and into the beginning stages of institutional cultural change. At a minimum, the symposium fostered greater awareness (and perhaps competence) of scholarly teaching at the University of the Pacific. However, it is our belief that the symposium went farther, helping to foster sustainable pedagogies and a network of learning that provides a starting point for broader institutional cultural change. Toward that end, hopefully

our experience in planning, implementing, and reflecting on the symposium, as well as the enclosed faculty manuscripts, contributes to the dialogue of SoTL and institutional change.



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## **Collaborative Teaching in a General Curriculum Seminar: An Assessment of Faculty Outcomes**

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### **Abstract**

A growing body of evidence focusing on student outcomes demonstrates the effectiveness of first-year and other seminar-based curriculum programs. The present study investigates how teaching in this type of program affects how faculty teach both in the program and in their own disciplines. Extending the qualitative work of McClure, Atkinson, & Wills (2008), faculty teaching in a seminar-based, collaborative teaching program completed a survey that assessed faculty perceptions of their teaching. Results indicated that faculty reported positive effects on their teaching, more reflection on their teaching, more focus on assessment, and a greater sense of community with their colleagues. Those faculty who perceived less stress related to teaching in the program reported higher levels of positive outcomes, and faculty perceptions were not related to how closely courses being taught in the program matched faculty members' disciplinary expertise. The findings indicate the value of seminar-based, collaborative teaching for faculty.

## **Introduction**

First-year and other seminar-based curriculum programs are increasingly common in US colleges and universities. Institutions use these programs to increase student retention rates, facilitate adjustment to college, and foster college-level, critical thinking in students (Jemelske, 2009). A growing body of research provides evidence of the effectiveness of such programs in accomplishing these desired outcomes (e.g., Bond & Lovegreen, 2012; Erickson & Stone, 2012; Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Salomone, 2002-2003; Stebleton, Jensen, & Peter, 2010). Less attention, however, has been devoted to documenting faculty outcomes associated with teaching in these programs (Fidler, Neururer-Rotholz, & Richardson, 1999; McClure, Atkinson, & Wills, 2008; Wanca-Thibault, Shepherd & Staley, 2002).

Extending work by McClure, et al. (2008), the present study uses the Core Program in the Liberal Arts (Core) at Queens University of Charlotte to investigate the following research question: How does teaching in a general, seminar-based curriculum program affect faculty and their teaching? Core has objectives similar to most first-year and other seminar-based programs, but Core uniquely achieves its objectives with a collaborative teaching model applied to courses that start in students' first semester and continue through their senior year, providing students with an extended, common educational experience focused on critical reasoning. Institutional assessment data consistently show the positive effects of Core on student learning. However, empirical scrutiny has not been given to the potential influence of Core on the faculty who teach in the program.

## **Faculty Teaching Outcomes in Seminar Programs**

Although the scholarship is limited, evidence exists that demonstrates the benefits for faculty teaching in seminar programs, and most of this evidence comes from evaluations of first-year programs. One faculty outcome that has been linked to teaching in first-year programs is the development of a better understanding of first-year students and their academic needs (Andersen, 2006; Evenbeck, Jackson, & McGrew, 1999; Stassen, 2000; Wanca-Thibault, et al., 2002). Faculty also report that involvement in first-year programs improves their teaching skills, and they apply newly learned teaching skills and methods to the other courses they teach within their discipline (Fidler, et al., 1999).

Further positive faculty outcomes are related to the collaborative nature of the teaching experience in first-year and other seminar-based curriculum programs (Brooks, Fox, Okagbue-Reaves, & Lukomski, 2009; Stevenson, Duran, Barrett, & Colarulli, 2005). These programs typically are interdisciplinary, which leads to a high degree of interaction between faculty members from across the university. This exposure to teachers from a variety of disciplines with varying teaching styles has been reported as beneficial to faculty members' own teaching and perceptions of support as programs create a sense of community among faculty who help each other and are jointly committed to improving students' educational experiences (Kemp & O'Keefe, 2003; Letterman & Dugan, 2004; Yakura & Bennett, 2003). Additionally, collaborative, interdisciplinary teaching experiences in general curriculum seminar programs, ranging from constructing common syllabi and service projects to formalized team-teaching, have positive effects on faculty members' development as teachers (Stevenson, Duran, Barrett, & Colarulli, 2005; Lester & Evans, 2009).

McClure, et al. (2008) provided a direct assessment of the effects of teaching in a general curriculum program on faculty outcomes. Using focus groups with 20 faculty members teaching in a first-year seminar program at a major research university, they documented specific ways that faculty teaching in the seminar program transferred their skills and attitudes about teaching to their other courses. Specifically, faculty reported (a) being more reflective about their teaching methods, (b) focusing more on critical thinking in class and through assessments, and (c) reevaluating the role of a college teacher from that of expert to facilitator. The current study extends this research by using survey questions generated from the themes revealed in McClure, et al.'s focus group data to explore further the effects on faculty of teaching in a seminar-based curriculum program. Further, the current study extends the research on faculty outcomes with data from a seminar program that continues beyond the first year.

### **The Core Program at Queens**

The general curriculum program evaluated in the present study was at Queens University of Charlotte, a comprehensive private university with an enrollment of about 2,600 students. Founded in 1989, Core is a required sequence of four courses that are discussion-based, interdisciplinary, and taught collaboratively.

The courses focus on practical reasoning that connects learning with living. Students and faculty engage in critical reasoning about perennial human concerns in diverse cultural and historical contexts.

The students enroll in the first course in the sequence during their first semester at the university. Here students examine ideas of the ancient world as they relate to modern ideas and issues. In this required, four credit-hour course, faculty use a common syllabus developed by an 18-20 member interdisciplinary team. During the semester, individual faculty members meet with approximately 20 students in seminars three days a week. On the fourth day, all faculty and students meet together for lectures or to engage in community-based activities. The following semester, students focus on issues in the modern world. In this three-credit hour course, only a portion of the syllabus is common to all sections and developed by the entire team. In contrast to the first course, this course has individual topics, such as issues concerning education or food in the modern world, that are embedded in the curriculum and developed by four or five member faculty teams. Students and faculty meet both in individual classes and with other classes that are studying the same topic.

During their second year, students enroll in a one-semester, three credit-hour course that explores political, economic, and social issues in a global context. Faculty teams of two or three members develop the curriculum that focuses on issues from the perspective of different regions of the world. The activities used to engage students with global issues change over time. A recent iteration of the course used a Model United Nations (UN) format, for which students selected individual countries to represent during mock UN sessions where students identified and presented solutions to the problems faced by the countries they were representing. During these UN sessions, students also voted on UN resolutions from the perspectives of their given country's leaders.

The last in the sequence of Core is an applied ethics capstone course. Faculty teams of five or six members have a common syllabus. Students study ethical theories and apply them to a variety of current issues. They explore such questions as, "What do I regard as a good or just community?" and "What do I regard as the best possible life?" Faculty and students in this course also reflect on the topics covered in the preceding three courses.

Faculty members in the core curriculum typically teach one or two courses an academic year and represent all of the colleges in the university, although the majority are members of the College of Arts

and Sciences. Since the courses are all interdisciplinary rather than multidisciplinary, faculty are required to depend on each other for support when teaching material from a field outside of their own discipline. Extensive planning is necessary in the development of the common syllabi, and to do so, each team holds a weekly one-hour meeting to plan teaching strategies for the up-coming classes. Additionally, faculty may attend workshops directed by experts from within and outside of the university. Consequently, faculty members from different disciplines are in contact with one another on a regular basis in a collegial effort to deliver the course using creative teaching methods.

## **Hypotheses**

Given the nature of Core and the findings from McClure, et al. (2008), we developed four general hypotheses to guide our work. First, we predicted that faculty members would report teaching in Core had positive effects on their teaching, in ways ranging from increasing faculty members' confidence about teaching to transferring newly learned methods to non-Core courses. Second, since teaching in a formal program requires faculty to juggle the demands of collaboration and other structural elements (e.g., imposed deadlines and assessment requirements), we predicted that instructors' self-reports of improved teaching would be moderated by perceptions of the stressfulness of teaching in the program. Third, we predicted that the perceived effectiveness of Core in improving teaching is related to the sense of community that faculty members develop from participating in the collaborative program. Fourth, since teaching in an interdisciplinary program requires faculty to teach courses that might seem unrelated to their specialty fields, we predicted that instructors' self-reports of improved teaching would be related to the degree to which Core courses were seen as matching faculty members' disciplinary expertise.

## **Method**

**Data and Measures.** To evaluate the Core Program's effects on faculty and their teaching, with Institutional Review Board approval, we distributed an electronic survey to all faculty who were teaching in the program during the 2010-2011 academic year. Thirty-seven of the 45 faculty members completed the survey, yielding a response rate of 82%. We used the broad themes detected in McClure, Atkinson, and Wills' (2008) focus group study as guides to develop 19 Likert-style survey questions about faculty members' teaching. Given our small sample size, we were unable to conduct a meaningful factor



analysis of our teaching questions. However, based on a careful examination of correlation matrices and dimensionality analyses, and, more importantly, relying on the conceptual logic of our question themes, we created five scales that use 15 of our survey questions (see Table 1 for details). As reported in Table 1, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values suggest that, overall our scales have high levels of internal consistency. The exception is the Focus on Assessment Scale ( $\alpha = 0.607$ ). Since we are using our scales as additive measures of general concepts of interest—and not indicators of latent variables—we retained the Focus on Assessment Scale for its practical value.

In addition to the teaching scales questions, respondents were given Likert-style items about the stressfulness of teaching Core compared to other courses, how closely their Core class matches their disciplinary expertise, and their perceived role as instructors. Basic demographic information was also asked, including several questions about faculty members' experience at Queens and teaching in Core.

**Table 1. Scale Questions and Internal Consistency Coefficients**

<i>Scales*</i>	<i>Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math></i>
<u>General Changes in Teaching Scale</u>	0.886
Teaching in the Core program has improved my teaching.	
I have learned new teaching methods in the Core program.	
Teaching in Core has encouraged me to take risks in my teaching.	
Since I started teaching in Core, I have become more willing to try new teaching methods.	
Core has improved my confidence in teaching.	
<u>Effects on Teaching Non-Core Classes Scale</u>	0.783
Teaching in the Core program has changed the methods that I use to I teach courses in my major.	
Since teaching in Core, I am more reflective about how I teach courses in my major.	
Since teaching in Core, I devote class time to discussions about critical thinking in my non-Core classes.	
<u>Reflection &amp; Awareness Scale</u>	0.861
Teaching in Core has led me to be more reflective on my role as a teacher.	
Since teaching in Core, I think more about the process of what goes on in the classroom.	
<u>Focus on Assessment Scale</u>	0.607
Teaching in Core has broadened the way I assess student learning.	

**Table 1. Scale Questions and Internal Consistency Coefficients**

I give students the opportunity to demonstrate their critical thinking skills when I assess their learning.	
Since teaching in Core, I am more understanding of students' academic needs.	
<u>Development of Community Scale</u>	0.890
Teaching in Core provides a sense of community for faculty.	
Since I started teaching in Core, I have developed supportive professional relationships with other instructors.	

\*Scales represent the summated totals from Likert-style response options ranging from 1-5, where 1= Strongly Disagree and 5= Strongly Agree.

As displayed in Table 2, the sampled faculty were overwhelmingly female and from the College of Arts and Sciences<sup>1</sup>. The average tenure at Queens was over 9 years. Most instructors had 2-3 semesters of experience teaching in the Core program, had taught more than two different Core courses, and stated that their current Core classes only "somewhat closely" matched their disciplinary expertise. Further, three-quarters of the sample agreed or strongly agreed that teaching in Core is more stressful than teaching other classes.

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Sample**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Mean or %</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min-Max</i>	<i>N</i>
Changes in Teaching Scale	18.89	4.46	8-25	36
Teaching Non-Core Classes Scale	11.03	2.56	6-15	34
Reflection & Awareness Scale	7.84	1.69	4-10	37
Focus on Assessment Scale	11.38	2.15	7-15	37
Development of Community Scale	9.19	1.22	5-10	37
Teaching Core is More Stressful	3.94	1.15	1-5	36
Years at Queens	9.63	7.11	1-24	35
Current Core Class Matches Expertise	2.00	0.88	1-4	37
Different Core Courses Ever Taught	2.75	1.20	1-6	36
In College of Arts & Sciences	91.7%	-	-	36
Gender (% Female)	75.7%	-	-	37
Semesters Teaching Core				36
First Semester	8.3%	-	-	

<sup>1</sup> The sample also was predominately White. Respondents' race/ethnicity was not collected to protect anonymity. In addition, it is worth noting that mean comparisons revealed no statistically significant differences on any of our teaching scales or other variables of interest by gender.

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Sample**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Mean or %</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min-Max</i>	<i>N</i>
2-3 Semesters	27.8%	-	-	
4-5 Semesters	13.9%	-	-	
More than 5 Semesters	50.0%	-	-	

**Analytic Strategy.** We start our investigation of the data by presenting some general descriptive findings and bivariate correlations that offer evidence related to the effects of teaching in Core for faculty members. We proceed with inferential tests to examine how factors, such as perceived stressfulness and disciplinary match, affect instructors' teaching. Given our small sample size, we use nonparametric statistics in all tests. Correlation analyses rely on Spearman's rank correlation coefficients ( $r_s$ ). Mean comparisons between two independent groups are accomplished with Mann-Whitney U-tests, the nonparametric equivalent of the independent samples  $t$ -test, and for mean comparisons of more than two independent samples, we use the Kruskal-Wallis test ( $H$ ), which is analogous to a one-way ANOVA.

## Results

Faculty members' self-reports suggest that they perceive teaching in the Core program to positively affect their teaching. In response to the statement "Teaching in the Core program has improved my teaching," 86.4% agreed or strongly agreed. Further, 54% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "Core has improved my confidence in teaching." In addition, Core faculty view the professor's role as more of a facilitator of learning than an authority on knowledge: 88.9% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "My role as a college professor is to facilitate students to take responsibility for their own learning," while 69.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "The primary role of a college professor is to be an expert." This perception of faculty members' role is consistent with the nature of the Core program, where professors are expected to engage their students in courses through a process of discovery rather than didactically deliver course content.

Results from our scales point to Core's positive influence on faculty members' work. On the General Changes in Teaching Scale, which captures whether instructors attribute improvements in their overall teaching to their involvement in Core, the observed average for the sample is quite high at almost

19 (with a potential maximum of 25). As presented in Table 2, high scores on the additional scales also suggest that faculty perceive Core to improve their non-Core classes, help them be more reflective in their teaching, and make assessment a more intentional focus of their work. Furthermore, the evidence strongly suggests that Core allows faculty to develop a supportive sense of community.

There is a statistically significant correlation between the General Changes in Teaching Scale and the Effects on Teaching Non-Core Classes Scale ( $r_s = 0.783$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This provides evidence that there is a positive carryover effect from what is gained through teaching in Core into other classes taught at the university. Additionally, scores on the Development of Community Scale were positively correlated with the General Changes in Teaching Scale ( $r_s = 0.527$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), Reflection & Awareness Scale ( $r_s = 0.376$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and the Focus on Assessment Scale ( $r_s = 0.378$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This result lends support to our assumption that Core is effective, in part, because it allows faculty to develop a sense of community with each other—a notion that we examine in more detail later.

In Table 3, we report mean comparisons on our teaching scales and other substantive questions by a Core involvement measure—that is, how many Core classes a faculty member is teaching during the current academic year. Faculty members teaching two or more Core classes have statistically significant higher scores on all the teaching scales except the one pertaining to sense of community. Further, those teaching multiple Core courses are not more likely to have been teaching at Queens longer, nor are they more likely to be teaching these Core classes because they match their disciplinary expertise. Findings in Table 3 also show that those who teach multiple Core classes perceive teaching in Core to be less stressful. Taken together, these findings suggest that the benefits of teaching in the Core program are most likely to be realized when faculty are involved more heavily than just teaching one course in an academic year, perhaps because this level of involvement in and experience with the program reduces perceptions of stressfulness. Although the results are not shown, we did conduct means comparisons using various categorizations based on our measure of Core experience (i.e., how many semesters overall faculty have taught in the Core program) and found no statistically significant variation in scale scores—similar to the effect of years at Queens reported in Table 3.

**Table 3. Mann-Whitney U-Tests of Mean Comparisons by Number of Core Classes Taught During Current Academic Year**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Mean (SD)</i>		<i>Z-Score</i>
	1 Class	2 or More Classes	
Changes in Teaching Scale	18.39 (4.18)	21.00 (5.60)	-1.97*
Teaching Non-Core Classes Scale	10.58 (2.27)	12.71 (3.25)	-2.23*
Reflection & Awareness Scale	7.62 (1.54)	8.71 (2.21)	-2.09*
Focus on Assessment Scale	11.00 (2.00)	12.86 (2.41)	-2.23*
Development of Community Scale	9.31 (1.04)	8.86 (1.86)	-0.44
Teaching Core is More Stressful	4.10 (1.11)	3.00 (0.89)	-2.41*
Years at Queens	8.96 (6.76)	12.29 (8.40)	-0.87
Current Core Class Matches Expertise	1.86 (0.88)	2.57 (0.79)	-1.90

\*indicates  $p < 0.05$ ;  $n$  ranges from 26-29 for the 1 class group and  $n = 7$  throughout for the 2 or more classes group.

The role of perceptions of stressfulness was explored further with the analysis presented in Table 4. Perceptions of stressfulness do appear to moderate the effects of teaching in Core. Those who do not see Core as more stressful than teaching other classes have statistically significant higher means on the Changes in Teaching Scale, the Reflection & Awareness Scale, and the Focus on Assessment Scale. Moreover, stress evaluations appear not to impede instructors' sense of community development, and perceptions of stressfulness do not seem to be a function of tenure at Queens or whether the Core classes being taught match the professors' area of expertise.

**Table 4. Kruskal-Wallis Tests of Mean Comparisons by Perceptions of Stressfulness of Teaching Core Classes**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Mean (SD)</i>			$\chi^2$
	Strongly Agree Core is More Stressful	Agree Core is More Stressful	Core is Not As Stressful	
Changes in Teaching Scale	16.50 (4.49) $n = 14$	18.67 (3.52) $n = 12$	22.33 (3.29) $n = 9$	9.56*
Teaching Non-Core Classes Scale	10.00 (2.37) $n = 12$	10.67 (1.92) $n = 12$	12.56 (2.96) $n = 9$	5.86
Reflection & Awareness Scale	7.14 (1.56) $n = 14$	7.54 (1.56) $n = 13$	9.11 (1.36) $n = 9$	10.34*
Focus on Assessment Scale	10.07 (1.86) $n = 14$	11.38 (1.80) $n = 13$	13.00 (1.69) $n = 9$	10.97*

**Table 4. Kruskal-Wallis Tests of Mean Comparisons by Perceptions of Stressfulness of Teaching Core Classes**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Mean (SD)</i>			$\chi^2$
	Strongly Agree Core is More Stressful	Agree Core is More Stressful	Core is Not As Stressful	
Development of Community Scale	8.86 (0.95) <i>n</i> = 14	9.08 (1.66) <i>n</i> = 13	9.78 (0.67) <i>n</i> = 9	5.10
Years at Queens	6.42 (5.26) <i>n</i> = 12	10.00 (6.89) <i>n</i> = 13	13.00 (8.70) <i>n</i> = 9	3.31
Current Core Class Matches Expertise	1.86 (1.03) <i>n</i> = 14	2.15 (0.90) <i>n</i> = 13	2.00 (0.71) <i>n</i> = 9	1.00

\*Indicates  $p < 0.05$ ;  $df = 2$ .

The data presented in Table 5 address our hypothesis more closely than the correlations reported earlier that developing a sense of community that is supportive and focused on teaching is an important mechanism through which Core positively affects faculty outcomes. We created three sense-of-community (SOC) categories based on the Development of Community Scale scores: Some SOC (scale scores= 5-7), Moderate SOC (scale score= 8), and Strong SOC (scale score= 9-10). Kruskal-Wallis tests show that professors' reports of general changes in teaching and focus on assessment scores vary by levels of SOC. Moreover, those with high SOC have statistically significant lower perceptions of Core's stressfulness. Developing a SOC also does not appear to be a function of years spent working at the university or the degree to which one's Core classes match one's disciplinary expertise.

**Table 5. Kruskal-Wallis Tests of Mean Comparisons by Level of Sense of Community (SOC)**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Mean (SD)</i>			$\chi^2$
	Some SOC	Moderate SOC	Strong SOC	
Changes in Teaching Scale	15.67 (5.86) <i>n</i> = 3	14.00 (4.54) <i>n</i> = 8	20.84 (2.64) <i>n</i> = 25	12.62*
Teaching Non-Core Classes Scale	10.00 (3.61) <i>n</i> = 3	9.50 (2.26) <i>n</i> = 6	11.52 (2.43) <i>n</i> = 25	3.50
Reflection & Awareness Scale	6.67 (2.31) <i>n</i> = 3	6.75 (2.19) <i>n</i> = 8	8.31 (1.26) <i>n</i> = 26	4.89
Focus on Assessment Scale	10.00 (2.00) <i>n</i> = 3	9.88 (2.59) <i>n</i> = 8	12.00 (1.77) <i>n</i> = 26	6.11*

**Table 5. Kruskal-Wallis Tests of Mean Comparisons by Level of Sense of Community (SOC)**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Mean (SD)</i>			$\chi^2$
	Some SOC	Moderate SOC	Strong SOC	
Teaching Core is More Stressful	4.00 (0.00) <i>n</i> = 3	4.63 (1.06) <i>n</i> = 8	3.72 (1.17) <i>n</i> = 25	6.35*
Years at Queens	3.33 (1.53) <i>n</i> = 3	8.14 (6.39) <i>n</i> = 7	10.80 (7.37) <i>n</i> = 25	3.88
Current Core Class Matches Expertise	2.67 (1.16) <i>n</i> = 3	1.75 (0.89) <i>n</i> = 8	2.00 (0.85) <i>n</i> = 26	1.86

\*indicates  $p < 0.05$ ;  $df = 2$ .

We further examined how disciplinary match might affect teaching-related outcomes by collapsing our matches expertise measure responses into the following three categories: matches not closely at all, matches somewhat closely, and matches fairly or very closely. The only statistically significant effect detected was for the Teaching Non-Core Classes Scale, where instructors who stated that their Core classes matched their expertise were more likely to report that teaching in Core has changed the way they teach other courses ( $\chi^2 = 7.69$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). That teaching in Core often requires instructors to teach well outside of their specialty areas, therefore, apparently does not influence whether faculty report that teaching in the program has positive outcomes for their teaching.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The present study examined the relationship between teaching in a seminar-based curriculum program and faculty perceptions of the influence of the experience on their teaching. Current research demonstrates the efficacy of such programs, especially first-year ones, for student outcomes; however, there remains a dearth of research on the potential benefits for instructors who teach in these types of programs. Our study contributes to the literature on faculty outcomes in two important ways. First, we extended the qualitative work of McClure, et al. (2008) with a quantitative assessment of faculty members' perceptions of improved teaching and how these improvements carry over into their non-seminar program courses. Second, we expanded the existing scholarship on faculty outcomes related to program participation by presenting findings from a seminar program that continues beyond the first year.

As hypothesized, we found that faculty reported teaching in Core had positive effects on their teaching, improved their non-Core classes, helped them be more reflective in their teaching, led them to more intentionally focus on assessment, and allowed faculty to develop a supportive sense of community with their colleagues. Further, we did confirm our assumption that perceptions of stressfulness of teaching in the program matter. Those who stated teaching in Core is more stressful than non-Core classes reported lower levels of positive faculty outcomes. In addition, our findings suggest that the perceived effectiveness of Core in improving teaching is related to the sense of community that faculty members develop from participating in the collaborative program. Unexpectedly, our findings do not support the notion of a positive relationship between perceptions of improved teaching and there being a match between the course being taught in the program and faculty members' disciplinary expertise.

How many years instructors have you taught at the university was not related to any of our outcomes. This result suggests that junior faculty see positive changes from teaching in general curriculum programs just like more senior ones do. This result also strengthens the argument that it is teaching in a structured, seminar-based curriculum program that drives instructors' perceptions of improvements in their teaching, not just that some have been teaching longer than others. Of course, selection effects are important to consider when interpreting this and all other findings from our study. Typically, instructors are invited to participate in the program evaluated here because of the quality of their teaching and commitment to the program's goals. Instructors' support of Core might also have led them to answer our survey questions in a positive manner, and, arguably, the questions themselves could be considered written in such a way to elicit favorable responses.

Despite the limitations of our study, the findings have important implications for US and international institutions. First, seminar-based curriculum programs can serve important faculty professional development functions. When faculty work with each other on courses in a structured program, they share teaching strategies and become socialized into the profession, which includes developing a clear sense of the role of the instructor in the college classroom. Faculty also develop a sense of community that has positive implications for their teaching and likely their professional identity. These faculty-focused outcomes should not be neglected as institutions consider the student learning and retention benefits associated with such programs. In fact, improving teaching can be an important



mechanism through which the more commonly reported student-focused objectives of seminar-based programs could be achieved, especially when instructors transfer their teaching skills gained through participating in collaborative teaching programs to courses throughout the university (McClure, et al., 2008). Second, our findings suggest that administrators need to focus on ways to reduce perceptions of stressfulness related to participating in general curriculum programs to maximize their effectiveness. Even at institutions without such formal programs, our finding that perceptions of stressfulness negatively affect teaching effectiveness should be noted. Finally, our results show that faculty are able to teach successfully outside of their narrow areas of expertise. Perhaps institutions could better capitalize on faculty members' creativity and adaptable skills to meet the new challenges of higher education we all face.

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## **Using Blogs to Enhance the Student Learning Experience in Social Sciences: An Application in Economics**

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### **Abstract**

The proliferation of widely-read blogs in the social sciences presents a pedagogical opportunity for instructors of undergraduate courses. This paper describes how the authors employed blog assignments in five microeconomics classes at Western Carolina University during the 2011 fall semester. Students were subsequently surveyed to assess the impact of blog assignments on their attitudes toward economics. The survey results indicate that the blog assignments stimulated student interest in economics, while also offering a number of advantages over traditional textbook-based homework assignments. In this paper, we make the case that blog assignments are an effective pedagogical tool in economics and should be similarly successful in other social science courses.

## Introduction

In *Creating Significant Learning for Students: An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses* (Fink, 2003), Dee Fink poses the provocative question: What do you want your students to know several years from now? While answering this question, the authors developed an assignment they hoped would provide a significant learning experience for students.

The blogosphere has become an increasingly important resource for the communication of ideas, supplementing, often supplanting more traditional sources of information, such as newspapers, periodicals, and trade magazines. Many blog sites focus on transmitting knowledge through various academic disciplines. For example, there is currently a multitude of sites in political science, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and especially economics<sup>1</sup>. McKenzie and Ozler recently noted that there has been a proliferation of economics blogs with an increasing number of economists attracting large readerships—economists, as well as non-professionals interested in discipline content—to their web sites (2011).

In an effort to stimulate student interest in economics at Western Carolina University, the authors have tapped into this burgeoning resource by adding five blog assignments to each of their principles of microeconomics classes. In the fall semester of 2011, students in their courses were required to comment on five different posts relating to economic issues from three selected blog sites. The web sites chosen were the Marginal Revolution ([www.marginalrevolution.com](http://www.marginalrevolution.com)), EconLog ([econlog.econlib.org](http://econlog.econlib.org)), and Greg Mankiw's blog ([gregmankiw.blogspot.com](http://gregmankiw.blogspot.com)). The three sites were selected because of their generally recognized excellence. Indicative of this perception is an online posting, "The 10 Really Best Economic Blogs" (Newmark, 2009), by Craig Newmark in which he includes these three websites in his top ten economic blog sites.

Initially, students were allowed to either turn in a hard copy of their comments, or submit them to the professor electronically via e-mail. Later, to better facilitate grading, the instructors required students to turn in hard copies of their blog comments. To enhance the blogosphere experience, instructors asked students to post those comments on the blog-site when possible

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Farrell and Sides note that there are at least eighty sites in the political science blogosphere (Farrell and Sides, 2010). Subsequently, Sides describes the importance of the blogosphere in disseminating knowledge in a discipline to academics, but also to non-professionals who are interested in a specific discipline (Sides, 2011).

(Greg Mankiw does not allow comments to be posted on his site because of previous commenter misbehavior). The authors encouraged posting comments because they believed it would enrich the students' experience by allowing them to become a relevant part of the discussion on current economic issues.

The use of blogs as a means to enhance student learning is not new. There is already a growing literature on how blogging can be used in a variety of courses (for example, Penrod, 2007 provides an overview). According to existing literature, the primary focus on blogging has been on blog writing, either a personal or class blog. We have been unable to find any reference to an assignment like the one described above, which uses blogs authored by disciplinary experts as source material for reaction essays and class discussion.

To assess the effectiveness of these blog assignments on student learning, a student survey was subsequently developed and administered toward the end of the semester in each class (Please refer to the Appendix for the student survey instrument). The purpose of the questionnaire was three-fold. First, the authors sought to assess students' perceptions as to the general effectiveness of the blog assignments. Second, the authors wished to statistically analyze any potential differences of opinion that may have existed between and among disparate groups of students. For example, might there be differences in opinion between Honors College students and non-Honors College students, between males and females, between economics minors and non-minors, and finally, between College of Business majors and non-College of Business majors. Third, the authors attempted to discover potential changes to future blog assignments to make them more effective and meaningful to students.

### **The Blog Assignment**

The blog assignments began approximately six weeks into the semester, a point at which even students in their first course in economics, which is the usual case in a principles class, would have been exposed to some basic economic concepts. The assignments were weekly for five consecutive weeks. Students were directed to peruse the three blogs and find one post that particularly interested them. Once a student had found a blog post, he or she composed a one to four paragraph comment to be printed out and handed in for credit. The students, if

possible—remembering that Mankiw does not allow posting on his site—were also asked to post their responses in the comments section of the original blog post.

The pedagogical intent of the exercise was to create a homework assignment distinct from the typical “end-of-chapter questions and problems” common in economics principles courses. The primary focus of the blog assignment was to foster independent student thinking about applications of economic reasoning, the “economics of everyday life.” The assignment also served as a tool for evaluating students’ writing ability, as well as their ability to articulate economic concepts in a way that most textbook-based homework and test-bank questions do not. The blog assignments allowed students to articulate and exchange ideas on economic issues in a medium that is their primary form of communication. The comments were graded on the basis of clarity of reasoning and the appropriate application of the economic concept being employed by the student. Spelling and grammar were also given weight as they would be in any writing assignment.

### **The Survey Instrument**

To ascertain students’ perceptions of the educational value of the blog assignments and to help identify the relative strengths and weaknesses of this tool, the authors created a student questionnaire which was administered at the end of the semester. To ensure anonymity in the survey’s administration, a student distributed and collected the questionnaires without the professors in the classroom.<sup>2</sup>

The survey instrument was divided into three sections. The first part of the questionnaire obtained student profile information. This included data on gender, year in school, Honors College student or non-Honors College student, College of Business major or non-College of Business major, etc. (Please refer to Table 1 for a profile of student respondents). The second section of the survey, the heart of the questionnaire, measured students’ opinions about the blog assignments. The third segment of the survey was an open-ended question designed to elicit student suggestions for improving future blog assignments.

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<sup>2</sup> The authors have successfully completed the course in Human Research offered by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) and thus are certified by the Institutional Research Board (IRB).



The questionnaire consisted of seven Likert items aimed at gauging student attitudes concerning the blog assignments (Likert, 1932). Likert-type scales can and historically have involved differing numbers of response categories. On the basis of several studies, McKelvie concluded that scales with fewer than five categories decreased reliability, while scales with more than eleven categories did not appear to improve reliability (1978). As a result, the authors opted for a symmetric seven category scale for the student survey. In previous studies, respondents expressed a preference for some type of labeling (Armstrong, 1987). In accordance with this view, the explicit labels of strongly disagree (1), to strongly agree (7), were included for each of the seven Likert items.

**Table 1: Sample Profile**

Number of students	146
Males	85
Females	61
Number of Students with Business Major	78
Number of Students who were Economics Minors	17
Number of Students enrolled in Honors College (one of the sections was an Honors section)	34
Median Class of Student	Sophomore
Median Grade Expectation of Student	B

In the analysis, descriptive statistics were first calculated for each of the individual Likert items in the questionnaire. Second, a standard correlation matrix was generated to examine whether there were differences in student opinion concerning the blog assignments on the basis of student characteristics. Special attention was focused on the following disparate groups: males versus females, College of Business majors versus non-College of Business majors, Honors College students versus non-Honors College students, economics minors versus non-economics minors (Please refer to Table 1 for the sample profile).

### **Survey Results**

In general, the overall response of students was very positive as evidenced by the empirical results from the seven Likert items, as well as student responses to the open-ended question in the third segment of the survey (Please refer to Table 2 for the descriptive statistics). With a median response of five or six and a mode of five, six, or seven, students agree with the following five statements: "The blog assignments helped to stimulate my interest in economics."; "The blog

assignments helped me to better understand concepts and issues in economics.”; “The blog assignments improved the quality of the class.”; “Blog exercises should remain as a part of future classes.” Blog exercises are more useful than traditional homework assignments like end-of-chapter questions.”

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics**

(1 indicates “Strongly Disagree”; 7 indicates “Strongly Agree”)	Mean	Median	Mode	SD
1. The blog assignments helped to stimulate my interest in economics.	4.952	5	5	0.118
2. The blog assignments helped me to better understand concepts and issues in economics.	4.836	5	5	0.121
3. The blog assignments improved the quality of the class.	5.164	5	6	0.117
4. I am likely to visit blog websites that address economic issues after this course is completed.	3.171	3	1	0.145
5. I am likely to post comments on blog websites that address economic issues after this course is completed.	2.658	2	1	0.129
6. Blog exercises should remain as a part of future classes.	5.603	6	7	0.128
7. Blog exercises are more useful than traditional homework assignments like end-of-chapter questions.	5.699	6	7	0.134

The authors found these results heartening, given our suspicion that the median student would generally prefer to have no homework at all. However, in general, students did not appear inclined to continue reading economics blogs after completing the course, and most indicated they were unlikely to post comments on those blogs again. The median responses on questions four and five in the survey were two and three with a mode of one. This result is not especially surprising, since it is unlikely that more than a fraction of students at this early stage in their academic careers—primarily freshmen and sophomores—would regularly read and post about topics in economics on the blog-sites. The authors’ hope, though, is that the assignment nevertheless generated genuine and, perhaps, a life-long interest in the broad application of economic principles to economic issues.

There is some disagreement among researchers as to whether or not parametric statistics should be employed in analyzing data obtained from Likert-type scales. Jamieson, for example, because of the ordinal nature of the data, considered only non-parametric statistical techniques appropriate for analysis (2004). Norman, however, in an analysis of many empirical

papers employing Likert-type scales, some dating as far back as the 1930s, concluded that the parametric statistics from these studies are robust (2010).

On the basis of Norman's findings and the symmetrical nature of the Likert-type scale employed in this study, the authors felt it appropriate to use a parametric correlation in analyzing the survey data (Please refer to Table 3 for the correlation coefficients). For the most part, the results were not surprising. For example, Honors College students and economics minors are slightly more likely than others to read and post on economics blogs in the future. Generally, though, the correlations are fairly small for how the disparate groups of students rate the assignment; male compared to female student, honors contrasted to non-honors student, economics minors versus non-economics minors, majors in the College of Business majors when compared to majors in other colleges. This indicates that the blog assignments were favorably received by most students in the principles classes, irrespective of sub-group.

**Table 3: Correlation Matrix**

	Sex	Hon.	Min.	Grade	COB	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7
Sex	1											
Hon.	-.288	1										
Min.	.091	-.048	1									
Grade	-.032	.380	.042	1								
COB	.044	-.135	.211	.004	1							
Q1	.109	.019	.133	.206	.094	1						
Q2	.076	-.038	-.003	.064	.093	.706	1					
Q3	-.010	-.087	-.012	.043	-.037	.673	.669	1				
Q4	.091	.095	.111	.033	.060	.533	.453	.432	1			
Q5	.207	.017	.094	-.081	.033	.417	.352	.324	.770	1		
Q6	-.011	-.057	.038	.096	.000	.592	.547	.699	.384	.280	1	
Q7	-.003	-.048	.015	.081	-.038	.482	.533	.606	.342	.205	.753	1

### **Suggested Modification for Future Blog Assignments**

As is often the case with new pedagogy, we encountered an unexpected problem with emailing the blog comments. As outlined above, students originally had the option of turning in blog comments via email or hard copy. The first logistical problem with that approach was that the professors found themselves printing their own hard copies anyway because it made them easier to grade. Also, it was simply not practical to respond to every student with their grade via email (typically over 100 students a week in the middle of a semester). Another problem arose in some cases because students' email attachments of their comments would not open. A final

complication was that a large portion of student e-mails were filtered out by WCU's aggressive spam filters, so determining whether a student had turned in their assignment on time (or at all) became unexpectedly labor-intensive. The authors recommend the lower-tech option of collecting and grading hard copies because it facilitated monitoring, grading and returning the blog assignments to students.

### **Summary of Open-Ended Statements**

While the survey results show the assignment was popular with students, the true strength of this e-assignment, in the authors' view, is that it engaged students with the course material on multiple levels. The comments on the open-ended question in Part III of the survey revealed a number of themes.

First, it served as a mechanism for encouraging students in these introductory courses to think more widely about course applications. A common theme in student comments was that the blogs applied class concepts in ways the student had not previously considered. In the preparation of the blog assignment, the authors noticed that there are multiple links and discussions of blog posts from academics in many social science areas, particularly anthropology, history, sociology, psychology, political science, and criminology.

One unexpected and positive result of the assignment was wide-ranging classroom discussions that allowed students with expertise from different majors to discuss different analytical approaches and research methods which are often applied to the same topics. Because students tended to view the assignment favorably, they seemed more willing to discuss their own perspectives on the most popular blog posts in class.

Finally, the written student responses to the open-ended survey question suggest that a blogging assignment can engage students with current events in a way that is often difficult with text-based assignments. Blogs are by definition current and topical—even discussions of the Great Depression or the Crusades seem more current in the context of a blog post, because what's emphasized is recent discovery; i.e., what do we know now that was not known before? It was clear from the survey responses that for most students the blog assignments simply seemed

more relevant to current events and their everyday lives than similar writing assignments based on course readings or lectures.

### **Study Limitations**

The primary limitation of the survey instrument is that it only addressed student attitudes and responsiveness to the blog assignment and did not measure learning outcomes. Because of this, the data we presented can only reveal how students viewed the assignment, i.e. interest, value versus other types of assignments, etc. In order to complete the reaction essays and to participate in classroom discussions, the students' first step is to read the required material.

The positive responses in the survey strongly suggest that students engaged the assigned blogs in a way that they did not with other assigned readings, particularly those based on the textbook.

A secondary limitation of this study is that the method used (statistical analysis of means and correlations) did not allow for a systematic analysis of the wide range of student feedback received, both in the surveys themselves and in the written comments the instructors received via Student Assessment of Instruction (SAI). Therefore the results of written statements on the surveys were summarized based on recurring themes in the previous section. We can confirm that our SAI comments on the blog assignment have been similar to those we observed in the survey instrument.

### **Conclusion**

The internet has been a boon to the dissemination of knowledge. However, there is a concern among educators that a negative consequence of the internet revolution has been a breakdown of language skills, spelling and grammar among students who are communicating more and more by e-mailing, texting, and tweeting. We believe that part of the challenge in getting students to read and write thoughtfully is getting them to read in the first place. The survey used in this study indicated that in the context of an introductory social science course, students found the assigned blogs more accessible than other types of assignments and readings. The authors believe that the blog assignments took advantage of the efficient transfer of information by the internet—a medium that is familiar to and positively viewed by students. At the same time, the assignment presented an opportunity for faculty to improve writing and thinking skills because blog

assignments are expected to be logically and concisely written, without grammatical or spelling errors, and are graded accordingly. Student feedback indicated that the use of the internet helped to foster added interest in economics, and should prove equally effective in other social sciences.

## Appendix

### Western Carolina University

#### Department of Accounting, Finance, Economics and Information Systems Student Opinion Survey

#### Part I Demographics (Circle one)

1. Gender M      F
2. Is this class required for your degree? Y      N
3. Are you an Honors College student? Y      N
4. Are you or do you plan pursuing a minor in Economics? Y      N
5. What is your expected grade in this class? A   B   C   D   F
6. What year in school are you? Fr   Soph   Jr   Sr
7. What is your major? \_\_\_\_\_  
(If undeclared, write undeclared in blank).

#### Part II Opinion Questions (Circle one)

On a scale from 1 to 7, with 1 indicating strong disagreement to 7 indicating strong agreement, indicate your opinion on each of the following six propositions.

- |   | Strongly<br>Disagree |   |   |   |   |   | Strongly<br>Agree |
|---|----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|-------------------|
|   | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7                 |
| 1. The Blog assignments helped to stimulate my interest in economics.   | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7                 |
| 2. The Blog assignments helped me to better understand concepts and issues in economics.                      | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7                 |
| 3. The Blog assignments improved the quality of the class.  | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7                 |
| 4. I am likely to visit Blog websites that address economic issues after this course is completed.            | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7                 |
| 5. I am likely to post comments on Blog websites that address economic issues after this course is completed. | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7                 |
| 6. Blog exercises should remain as part of future classes.  | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7                 |
| 7. Blog exercises are more useful than traditional home-work assignments like end-of-chapter questions.       | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7                 |

#### Part III. Open Ended Question

1. Please write freely about your thoughts as to the overall usefulness of the blog assignments. Include any suggestions that you may have for improving the effectiveness of the blog exercises.

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### **Getting To Know You: When Formative Assessment Meets Instructional Technology**

Bruff, D. (2009). *Teaching with Classroom Response Systems: Creating Active Learning Environments*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Don't let the title fool you. You need not use a particular type of 'clicker' to find practical value in *Teaching with Classroom Response Systems: Creating Active Learning Environments*. As the author states, it is the intention of the book to be used as a resource, offering practical advice and lessons learned for engaging students by way of clickers and other hand-held devices. Particularly relevant in an era where ever-occurring text messaging on ubiquitous smart phones is *de rigor* on the higher education landscape, the book is primarily for those who are new to using clickers (and similar devices such as smart phones) to elicit student response.

Offering concrete perspectives for educators and faculty developers in higher education, the content in the book is presented as a series of questions and answers instructors using this technology are likely to ask. The teaching methods described therein are real-life case studies from instructors who are using these approaches are widely generalizable and relatively independent of discipline or subject matter area.

Focusing on the many teaching choices instructors face when using hand-held technologies, the book offers informed and intentional reflection from practitioners already immersed in this innovative practice. Because the focus is more on teaching – and less on the technical minutiae of setting up and administering a system – the author drills down to the fundamental uses of clickers and mobile devices as a means for engaging in and assessing student learning.

The author shares descriptions of examples of clicker questions and offers a variety of learning activities as illustrative case studies drawn from undergraduate and professional learning settings. Using the power of peer and collegial experience as a basis for case studies, the content of the book is presented through several frameworks, including hierarchical question types, types of student responses, techniques for structuring class activity and discussion, and strategies for assessment. Arising from structured interviews with over fifty professors, the author provides concrete examples of clicker use, which will no doubt inspire the reader to consider using these techniques in his/her own classroom.

Building on the umbrella concept of peer instruction, both pragmatic advice and lessons learned from using clicker technology as a means for promoting and encouraging student engagement is presented.

Emphasizing active learning, the book is divided into many topical areas and opens with suggestions for engaging students in the learning process through small group discussions, illustrating the concept of peer instruction. Building around clicker use, the book then focuses on tailoring one's instruction in order to capitalize on on-the-spot decision-making, the ability to provide timely feedback, and the benefit of facilitating graded quizzes and tests.

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